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USDA FAS FOR OA, OSTA, OCB, OCRA, OFSO,
USDA FOR DUS LAMBERT AND TERPSTRA, APHIS/IS, FSIS
USTR FOR AUSTR BWEISEL, DAUSTR JJENSEN, AGRICULTURE

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SUBJECT: U.S. Beef - Singapore Cautious About Expanding
Market Access

1. (SBU) Summary: Singapore will move cautiously in lifting its remaining import restrictions on U.S. bone-in cuts of beef and other meat products, Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) CEO and CVO Dr. CHUA Sin Bin told USDA Deputy Under Secretary Lambert on February 13. AVA did not want to "rock the boat" with its constituents, many of whom would be uncomfortable moving from a "zero-tolerance" to a "controlled risk" (i.e., science-based) approach to managing imports of beef products from BSE countries, Dr. Chua claimed. DUS Lambert stressed that USDA wanted to work with AVA through this transition. DUS Lambert also discussed the U.S.-Singapore-Indonesia Avian Influenza eradication project in Tangerang, Indonesia in a separate meeting with Ministry of Health Senior Director (Operations Group) KOH Peng Keng. End summary.

Still Premature to Lift Restrictions

2. (SBU) DUS Lambert and the Food Safety Inspection Service's Rick Harries briefed Dr. Chua on the U.S. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) Risk Status Classification Request to the World Animal Health Organization (OIE). They also discussed the 2006 revised Harvard Risk Assessment of measures USDA had undertaken since the December 2003 detection of BSE in the United States. DUS Lambert noted that the OIE would disseminate a proposed risk classification of countries for BSE, Rinderpest, and other diseases later this month. He expressed his hope that Singapore would support the OIE's recommended risk classification for the United States at the OIE General Assembly in Paris in May. As DUS Lambert explained, a "controlled risk" classification, for example, would clarify the eligibility of U.S. beef and variety meats from animals of all ages to be traded, depending on the removal of specified risk materials (SRMs).

3. (SBU) Dr. Chua responded that it was still premature for AVA to expand the range of U.S. beef products allowed into the Singapore market beyond boneless cuts of beef. He noted that AVA was satisfied with the progress the United States had made in addressing AVA's concerns with some initial shipments that recommenced last year, and praised

the good working relationship AVA enjoyed with USDA in managing these imports. (Note: Singapore lifted its two-year ban on boneless cuts of U.S. beef from animals under 30 months of age in January 2006. End note.)

14. (SBU) Dr. Chua said he appreciated the updated information contained in the USG's OIE classification request and the Harvard Risk Assessment. However, his inclination to move slowly on additional market access stemmed from what he deemed "worrying" scientific research that, for example, indicated the detection of prions in certain bovine products. (Note: Dr. Chua made this claim without demonstrating that these products were potentially infective materials. End note.) He also questioned the usefulness of the current OIE classification system, noting that it did not take into account prevalence information.

What it Will Take

15. (SBU) Dr. Chua stated that the GOS would not make any decision before the OIE meeting in May. However, even if Singapore were to remove its remaining restrictions on U.S. beef imports at a later date, it would insist on requirements that differed from OIE guidelines, he said. In particular, AVA would apply the OIE definition of SRMs for animals over 30 months of age to animals of all ages.

16. (SBU) AVA was continuously reviewing new information and developments, but did not want to "rock the boat," Dr. Chua said. A number of AVA's constituents would be uncomfortable moving from a "zero-tolerance" to a "controlled risk" approach for managing imports of beef products from BSE countries. Dr. Chua expressed specific concerns about importing from countries with relatively

high prevalence of BSE, some of which had also approached AVA to lift their respective import restrictions. He explained that Singapore could not rely solely on OIE guidelines, but rather would have to conduct its own assessment to reassure its consumers. DUS Lambert said that USDA was willing to work with AVA as it moved towards a "science-based" risk assessment approach.

17. DUS Lambert did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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